

## ABSTRACT

An apparatus and method for treating an intervertebral disc having an inner nucleus pulposus and an outer annulus fibrous includes a thermal probe defining proximal and distal ends and having a guidable region adjacent the distal end thereof. The guidable region is characterized by having sufficient rigidity to advance within the annulus fibrous of the intervertebral disc in response to an axial force exerted on the proximal end of the thermal probe while having sufficient flexibility to substantially follow and conform to an azimuthal course defined by the natural striata of the annulus fibrous. The thermal probe is adapted for connection to a thermal energy source to provide thermal energy to the annulus fibrous to alleviate pain associated with the intervertebral disc.